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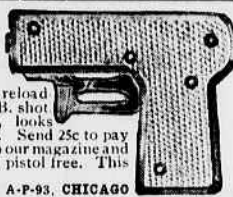
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handed the paper back to me without a word.

I looked at the marked paragraph. It ran as follows:

"Nevertheless, considering the history of these islands, one is compelled to allow that successive waves of immigration, arriving from India, China, and the continent of Africa, have in so far modified the original duels—"

It was my turn to grow red. I felt myself flushing pinker than even Hahn had done.

"May one ask," said Gore, in a singularly gentle and agreeable voice, "what duels are doing in this particular galley? I never heard it was a custom of the races under question; but if you have made any new discovery—"

"Paying me a salary doesn't entitle you to make fun of me, sir," I cut in, breathing rather hard.

"No, young devil," said Gore, still in that pleasant voice; "but it does entitle me to notice if you mean to leave."

"I don't mean to—" I began.

"Oh, yes, you do," said Gore. "By the shortest route—home. Now, will you please tell me what you mean by cooking up duels when you are engaged in my service?"

HIS pleasant manner had suddenly flown out of the window, and the last sentence was spoken in a tone that would—I suppose—have scared some people. It was also decorated—considerably. Gore was a remarkable hand at decorated language on occasion.

I said nothing at all. I looked at him.

"You know I can give information to the authorities, and stop it," said Gore. I said nothing.

"You know I can dismiss you at the first port."

I thought it time to speak.

"You can do all those things," I said. "But you won't, Vincent Gore, because you're not the sort of man, whatever you may say, to stop a fight. Also because I can jolly well guess you've fought duels yourself."

Gore leaned back in his seat and gave vent to one of his appalling shouts of laughter. A seared small steward peeped in at the door, asked feebly if the Herr wanted anything, and scurried away without waiting for an answer.

"Well aimed!" he said. "Sit down and tell me about it."

And I knew that I had won. I may mention here that the "sir" was dropped from that day onward between us.

I told him. He made no comment for a moment, and then asked:

"They are evidently trying to force the challenge from you, so as to deprive you of the choice of weapons. How are you with a pistol?"

"Well, if you want to know, I'm just beautiful," I replied. "I've been a decent shot since ten, and a lovely one since I was twenty."

"Let him do the challenging; he will if you sit tight," observed Gore.

"That's all right; the old gentleman with the face won't stop him," I said. "We understand each other. Hahn is a white man. I wish I could punch his head instead. I'd enjoy it more, somehow."

I WENT out again into the warm wind and the sun, pondering on many things. It seemed to me I had acquired a good deal of food for thought that day already, although it was not yet eleven o'clock.

I was to acquire more. Half an hour afterward, I met my employer coming round a corner with an expression of abject terror on his face.

Sudden death was the smallest thing I thought of. Such ideas as an outbreak of bubonic plague on the ship, a coming typhoon that was bound to wreck us, fire among explosives in the hold, rushed through my mind, it is true, but only to be discarded on the instant. Nothing of that sort would have disturbed Red Bob's equanimity. Then what, in the name of all calamity and disaster, had disturbed it?

My heart, as he came nearer, began to thump like the screw of the steamer.

Surely unheard-of things were happening to-day! I saw that Red Bob was gnawing the end of his mustache, and that his eyes looked like the eyes of a cat that is just going to jump out of your arms through the window. I should not have been surprised to see him make a spring over the rail.

"What—" I began rather breathlessly.

"God save us, Corbet!" said the great explorer, almost trembling. "The damned ship is full of damned women!"

"Come into my cabin," was the first thing that occurred to me to say, for I really thought him mad.

He preceded me into the little blue-and-white room, and sat down abruptly, mopping his forehead and looking at me with an expression of dismay. I switched on the electric fan, and under cover of its steady buzz, which insured us against being overheard from the next cabin, asked him:

"Has anything happened?"

GORE was recovering somewhat. He answered peevishly:

"I told you what had happened. The ship is crawling with them. At least, there are three, and that's as good—or as bad—as thirty."

"I never knew you were—at least, on the *Empress*—"

"Give me a drink," interrupted Red Bob.

I poured him a glass of tepid water; he drank it, and went on:

"On the *Empress*, and after, the women, what there were of them, were married, if you'll remember."

I did. The only women passengers from Liverpool to Singapore had been a few wives going to join their husbands. And later, on the way to Batavia and Macassar, there were no women at all, except a few half castes.

"Don't you like unmarried women?" I asked, still feeling puzzled.

Red Bob poured out and drank another glass.

"I do not—I do not!" he said. "Two of these are married, I believe—a Frau Baumgartner and a Frau Schultz—going to join their husbands in Simpsonhafen. But the third! Young Corbet, for God's and your employer's sake, go and flirt with the whole lot till we get there. I believe you're quite capable of it!"

"I don't mind," I said, struggling with a frantic desire to laugh; "but I haven't much leisure time."

"You shall have all you want," declared Gore, leaning back in his seat and watching the blue curtains sway out and in

through the yellow circle of the port. "I feel better now. It was the lean one did it. She scared the seven senses out of me, up there on the boat-deck just now."

"Would you mind telling me what she did?" I asked.

I would have given the world to be able to explode, like an overcharged soda-water bottle.

"She didn't do anything. She sat and babbled. She saw a hole in my sock where I'd just torn it on a nail, and she put her head on one side and said: 'Oh, Mr. Vincent Gore, what a sad life you must lead, without a woman's hand to attend to these things for you!'"

I was speechless.

He went on:

"And then she said, 'Is there nothing I could do for you?' 'Madam,' I said, 'you could—' But she stopped me, and said with another snigger, 'I'm not madam; I'm miss—I'm a girl!' A girl, and she as old as I am! 'Well, madam, or miss, as you like,' I said, 'you could leave me alone; I want to read.'"

"You didn't!" I interrupted.

"I did," said Gore, with a terrified look.

It was too much. I collapsed on my berth, and shrieked, rolling over and over in an agony of mirth.

"I never thought you were afraid of anything," I choked, wiping the tears out of my eyes.

"You thought dashed wrong," replied Gore. "That sort of woman has been the tragedy of my life. Corbet,"—he sat up straight, and his blue eyes dilated into the lakes of fire that had won him his name,— "Corbet, some day a woman like that'll get me, and I won't even have the pluck to hang myself."

"Oh, rats!" I said disrespectfully, rocking to and fro in the anguish of my enjoyment. "A woman can't make a man marry her. Anyhow, I never was afraid of anything that wore a skirt, in all my life."

"Honest Injun?" asked Red Bob, fixing his eyes on me.

"Honest!" I said.

"Shake!" remarked Bob gravely, holding out his hand. "You're a braver man than I am."

"Well, I know what your heel of Achilles is now," I said, getting up and going to the glass.

"What are you after?" asked Gore.

I pulled down my tie and buttoned up my coat.

"Going to talk to the lady," I said.

I was curious to see the woman who had seared Red Bob.

To be continued next week

The Bird that Kicks Like a Mule



There is literally nothing left of the snake that gets into a fight with this bird: for the secretary always ends by swallowing its victim. In South Africa, where the woods are full of snakes, the secretary-bird is greatly beloved.

THE rarest and most valuable birds in the New York Zoological Garden are the strange pair of secretary-birds quartered in the ostrich house. "Secretary-birds" they are called because of the crest of long dark plumes that rises from

the back of their heads, giving them the appearance of a clerk with a bunch of quill feathers behind his ear. It's an aristocratic name; but the thing that makes the secretary-bird valuable is not his looks. The natives of South Africa love him because he can kick like a mule.

A Fight Between Snake and Bird

TOSS into his cage a snake, no matter how vicious, and the fight begins immediately. The bird cautiously approaches the snake, with wings widespread to escape the sudden lunges by flight if necessary. Once, twice, three times, perhaps, the snake lunges. The bird darts back, waiting his chance. At last it comes, and one of those long, hard legs shoots out like the hoof of a mule, landing squarely on the snake's head. It reels, and falls back stunned, to be knocked out completely by a second blow. And then its victor proceeds to swallow it whole.

In South Africa the birds are regarded as a great protection. They are affectionate mates, and always travel together. When pursued they spread their wings and make off over the ground with the speed of a running horse. This is the first part to be quartered in our climate. If Saint Patrick had been blessed with half a dozen secretary-birds, his clean-up in Ireland would have been very much easier.